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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Anglican Consultative Council, Association of Presbyterian Women of Aoteaora (New Zealand), Church Women United, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, Lutheran World Federation, Presbyterian Church USA, Salvation Army, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, United Church of Christ Board for World Ministries, Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, Women's Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women and World Young Women's Christian Association, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Ecumenical Women, a coalition of Christian denominations and organizations, welcome the review of the Beijing Platform for Action at the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. We affirm the promotion of gender equality, development and peace as fundamental to realizing women's human rights, as declared in the Beijing Platform for Action, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Security Council Resolution 1325 and other international agreements.

We condemn oppression, violence and women's exclusion from political and social processes using religious beliefs to legitimize such practices in conjunction with political interests.

The state has the primary responsibility to prevent violence and discrimination and to promote and protect the economic and social human rights of women and their families. As churches and faith-based organizations, we also play a role through advocacy and education.

Progress has been made since the first world conference on women in 1975 and there have been important steps towards gender equality. More women now have access to education and health care. Rape and violence against women is now globally understood as a crime.

Despite the twenty years of national and international agreements to advance women's rights, many of the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action remain unfulfilled. Gender biased institutional structures create inequalities and discrimination, and still exist in public and private sectors, academia, and religious structures. We are concerned with the lack of full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the efforts to roll back gains.

In this year of assessment, 20 years after the Beijing Platform for Action, Ecumenical Women highlights the following themes that require action by all states to advance women's human rights:

Violence and discrimination against women

The Beijing Platform for Action and Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women state that gender based violence and violence against women and girls are gross violations of human rights. Gender discrimination, cultural, structural and economic factors are underlying root causes of violence that demean the dignity of women and girls. Lack of equality in education, unequal pay for equal work, sexual harassment, human trafficking, higher health care costs, lack of access to services and inheritance laws are just a few examples of this inequality.

The endemic culture of legal impunity for crimes is a barrier to addressing violence against women and girls. Local authorities and justice systems often fail to prosecute offenders. Survivors of violence lack sufficient care and protection. Maintaining a system of male domination, linked to racism and class inequality, perpetuates discrimination and violence against women. Sexual violence in contexts of militarism and of conflict involving State or non-state actors persists and is

destructive of communities. States that bear primary responsibility to protect women and girls from violence are often perpetrating violence through militarism.

Gender equity awareness and engaging men and boys in this work are critical in changing societal and individual behaviours. Peace and non-violence education should be taught at all levels.

We therefore appeal urgently to Member States to:

- Fully implement the Beijing Platform for Action and other relevant international agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ensure discrimination and gender biases are eliminated in local and national laws, policies and customs;
- Protect women's rights by eradicating unlawful and harmful practices that perpetuate violence against women, and implement Security Council resolution 1325 and subsequent related resolutions;
- Ensure perpetrators of violence against women and girls are prosecuted, judicial and criminal systems are reformed, reparations and counselling are provided for victims of violence, clear sexual harassment policies in all institutions of society are created, and gender education and training for police and judges on all levels are conducted;
- Create awareness and education programs that will mobilize participation of men and boys as partners to address violence against women and girls, including in armed forces.

Poverty, inequalities and climate change

Although efforts have been made to combat poverty, especially after the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals, the gap between the wealthiest and the poorest is increasing. Poverty is persistent and a burden on women and girls, the elderly and people with disabilities, rooted in structural inequality and gender and race- based discrimination. Transformative policies and people-centred development that deliver essential economic and social rights for all are necessary to achieve true equality between women and men as well as across race, ethnicity, national status, class and other structures of domination.

Women and girls are among those most affected by climate change, which threatens their lives and livelihoods. Climate change is a direct threat to peace and development. Poor communities are often the first and hardest affected by climate change. A holistic approach to development, with climate mitigation and adaptation, is necessary to reduce climate change-related disruptions.

We urge Member States to:

- Put in place mechanisms that ensure the participation of civil society organizations in the planning processes of national development plans and budgeting and ensure women's representation in such spaces;

- Design emergency interventions to cope with climate change disasters that have a gender perspective and an inclusive approach to meet the special needs of women, girls, elderly and people with disabilities;
- Strengthen global regulatory frameworks to ensure adherence to human rights, labour standards and environmental agreements by international institutions, governments and corporations;
- Implement pro-poor and gender-sensitive measures that ensure equitable access to productive resources, including land and sea;
- Remove legal and other obstacles to women's ownership of land, inheritance and equal access to loans, social security and pensions;
- Ensure full, decent employment for women including equal pay for equal work both formal and informal;
- Reallocate resources used for war and militarism to mitigate climate change, implementing the standards established in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Education and training of women and girls

Education, which epitomizes the indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights is key for redressing gender injustice in society and for overcoming social and cultural norms that discriminate against girls, especially in terms of access to opportunities.

Systemic barriers, cultural and social beliefs and practices, violence, as well as cost prevent girls and women from benefiting from educational opportunities to the same extent as their male counterparts. Child, early and forced marriages and lack of safety result in girls dropping out of school. Enduring obstacles to access are rooted in education policies, which tend to focus on formal schooling with little attention paid to building literacy and marketable skills.

We urge Member States to:

- Remove economic and other barriers to women's educational success; support and increase public spending for education of women; create incentive programs to encourage girls' participation in secondary education;
- Promote educational models that equip women to assume positions of leadership and decision-making;
- Initiate programs that encourage men and boys to adopt new approaches toward women and girls and value their contributions.

Women and health — full access to reproductive health and informed decision-making

Women's control over their bodies and their reproductive health continues to be denied or limited. Women are often prevented from obtaining treatment due to poverty, geography, weak health systems or discrimination. HIV-positive women, women with disabilities, older women, migrant women, poor women, ethnic and

other racially oppressed women, women in situations of military occupation and other contexts often face a greater degree of discrimination when trying to obtain treatment and access to health services, particularly sexual and reproductive health services.

Women often have less status and access to health care and economic security than men. War and conflict undermine or destroy efforts to build national women's health infrastructure, as do economic austerity programs and privatization schemes.

A gender-sensitive response to the health care needs of women must confront the changing social, cultural and economic factors that put women and girls at risk. Investment in women and girls is needed, with adequate funds to organizations that reach women and girls.

We ask Member States to:

- Affirm the right of women and men, especially young people, to have access to comprehensive sexual reproductive health education and services;
- Reverse trends to privatize public health systems and fully fund women's health infrastructure, including reproductive health services;
- Emphasize and respond to the growing feminization of HIV/AIDS and provide full access to health services and medicine;
- Promote closer partnerships with civil society, faith-based organizations and the United Nations in order to increase the capacity for care and support;
- Provide full access to health care for all women and girls.

We affirm that God's world was meant to be one of abundance for all people, with fundamental rights and dignity for all women and men. For healthy sustainable societies, women must be integral to the decision-making processes in law, policies and development programs. Women are needed at the centre of post 2015 development agenda.